



In Times Like These: Purim 5786 / 2026

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A Prayer Before Doing Community Protection Work, Going To a Protest, Lobbying a Lawmaker, or Actively Bearing Witness

The moment before action
is the pause before a song.

Here I am, ready and willing
to see what's real and speak what's true.

Remind me there's no shame in fear
so long as I don't let it stop me.

Strengthen in me the deep desire
to stand up for what I know is right.

Let me be like Esther
bravely going before the king.

May the mitzvot be my true colors.
May I live up to who I aspire to be.

These are the days we've got:
let us rejoice and do good in them.



*R. Rachel Barenblat
art by Steve Silbert*



Before You Go

Esther fasted before she went.

You drink coffee
Charge the phone
Pack cash, hand warmers,
Goggles, meds in case of arrest and
Soapy water for the pepper spray.

Get out the whistle
Make a sign
Learn new songs
Remember your ID
Put on your tallit.

Give thanks for your neighbors
Know your rights in case you're detained
Say a prayer or two
Tell people you love that you love them
Write a will.

Esther fasted but please
Eat something before you go,
You need your strength.
Be safe.
Thank you.

Trisha Arlin



Ad Lo Yada

Holy One of blessing, you are the great differentiator, *hamavdil bein or l'choshech*, distinguishing between light and dark, holy and profane. Yet tonight, as we read the story of Esther and Haman, Mordechai and Achashveirosh, you ask us to make a mitzvah of altering our states of consciousness *ad lo yada* – until we can no longer discriminate between hero and villain, between “Blessed be Mordechai” and “Cursed be Haman.”

This is the powerful irony and the surprising lesson at the heart of our celebration. You demand we turn the narrative on its head, mandating a confusion of relative righteousness, declaring that wise one and fool, hero and villain are interchangeable, bidding us to see even those whom we fear as brethren so that we might stand face to face with the pure soul of our foe and bless him.

But must we adhere to that mitzvah THIS year? In the face of rampant White supremacy? I'm afraid I cannot.

All I can think is that you ask us to focus on blessing, not anger and curses. All I can think is that you require us to be vigilant in training our hearts to love. All I can think is that abandoning the mitzvah of offering equal blessing to Haman would relinquish ground to the evil around us.

*

Please, hover near, dear Shechinah. Imbue us with your loving kindness. Bless us with the strength to cultivate undifferentiated love, impossible as that feels when our neighbors are under siege, their children afraid of returning from school to desecrated homes and disappeared parents.

On Minneapolis streets protestors have been singing to ICE: “Put down your weapons and sing your part. We walk the same ground, but we're torn apart...” May we not forget there is something greater than judgment. And may our practice of radical love, here below, arouse a great flow of healing in the heavens.

Amen.

R. Hannah Dresner

Darkness / Light



Joanne Fink

Haman, Wearing the King's Signet



Steve Silbert

Esther Who Dangles

Look at this painting and
Imagine it is Esther who dangles there
In performance
Dancing for all the men who use her:

The uncle who sells her for a title
The king who buys her body
The people for whom she dares to speak
The ones who murder for revenge in her
name.

Covered in blood
Dripping with red alerts and discipline
And yet still beautiful
Still inspiring desire.

And still she hangs
Like a charm on a little girl's bracelet
Or a Jew on Haman's gallows
And we continue to stare.

Or we could stop looking
Cut her down
Clean her off and
Leave her alone.



Trisha Arlin
art by *Mike Cockrill*



The Whole Megillah

Meet Mordechai,
named for the god Marduk,
slayer of dragons
and arbiter of destiny.
Meet Esther
named for Astarte,
the Queen of Heaven
and goddess
of fertility and war.
Hidden to most of us¹
today but known to all
in ancient Israel and Persia
who listened to the reading
of the Book of Esther.
Both Mordechai and Esther
wore the masks
of foreign gods
hidden in their names.
Yet in a destined moment
Mordechai risks his life
and refuses to bow
before Haman
whose name means
Mr. Magnificent
(he likely named himself).
and tells him,
“I’m that Jew,
Mordechai son of Yair,
you’d like to kill.”

And in another destined moment
Esther risks her life
by revealing to the king
that she’s a Jew named
Hadassah daughter of Avichail,
younger cousin of
Mordechai ben Yair.
The Jews fought
to protect themselves
from Haman’s genocidal plot,
and from then on,
the megillah says,
“The Jews enjoyed light
and gladness,
happiness and honor.”
Lesson learned?
It’s important to know
our Jewish names
hidden beneath the masks
we wear to get along.
That’s the whole megillah.

R. David Zaslow

¹ The name Esther evokes the Hebrew word *nistar*, hidden. The name is from Old Persian and means “star” and was associated with the goddess Astarte, also known as Ishtar.

Matters





When Courage

I fear I am not brave, although I wish I were.
Would I have stayed in Egypt or
complained across miles in the desert?
Would my rose colored glasses have led me
right into the showers?
Would I have walked a bridge in Selma?
I wore no pink hat to the White House.

Where and when is courage born; is it
before or after the danger presents?
Is it innate...or developed...or both?
With Miriam, Ruth, and Esther, I pray to be strong.
I pray to be faithful. I pray to stand up, not
stand by when so much weighs these days
on shouting NO to those asking for our papers.

sherrill cropper



Vashti Says No

Ladies, get me some water.
What happened? I'll tell you.
He summoned me,
That old demented bully,
He wants to show me off naked to his cronies!
Absurd.
I didn't think
I just answered.
I said to the messenger,
Tell him, Vashti says No.

Back comes the messenger, just a kid,
Poor thing, I feel for him because
When the disgusting idiot, my husband
Heard of my refusal,
He exploded.
So, it's official: Queen Vashti is
Divorced and banished:
Make room for the next one!
Hmph! Do I care?
Tell him, Vashti says No.

Now what? What do I do?
So boring.
If not magnificent, what will I be?
Merely a princess of Babylon,
Kidnapped as a girl by Darius of Persia,
Trafficked to his idiot son to marry?
So from now on I will
Only be merely fabulous me?
So interesting.
Tell him, Vashti says No.

The kid comes back with a black eye,
And a message from my brand new ex:
Beloved Wife! I'm in such a good mood!
Put on your crown and parade your beautiful body!
Beg for forgiveness and we will party
In my giant new gold ballroom
With all my billionaire friends!
I give the poor boy an aspirin.



Remember to duck, I say,
When you tell the king, Vashti says No.

Maybe I'll cut off my long black hair,
Maybe I'll burn all my beautiful clothes.
Maybe I'll stop wearing make up.
Maybe I'll get fat. Hah!
Show this off, Buster.
You know, I've got a lovely palace in the country,
I think I'll plant tomatoes.
Maybe I'll take a lover
And then make a documentary
Titled, "Vashti Says No".

The boy is back, I think his arm is broken.
He shakes and cries as he tells me,
The old man wants my crown,
For the succeeding wife-to-be.
My crown?! The boy trembles. I laugh.
This ugly vulgar thing?
The creep does love his shiny garish crap.
Take it! Better her than me!
Curse Vashti when you hand it to him,
That might save your life
As Vashti says No.

Here's some sisterly good advice for the next one:
Let him pretend to be a genius!
Give him gold prizes, doesn't matter what for,
He loves his fake awards.
Do what you got to do
But get him drunk first, it goes faster.
Oh and watch out for that creepy bald toad, Haman,
He really hates immigrants.
Say yes if you must but please, honey,
Tell him, Vashti says No.

Trisha Arlin



Mike Cockrill

God's Mask

Five years ago,
Just around Purim,
The world turned shut,
And it never reopened.

Everything tipsy,
Everything topsy-turvy,
Everything down,
And everything up.

The world has turned
Wobbly and wasted,
While we try to stand upright,
To hold ourselves up.

Maybe this year on Purim,
We try to be normal,
Just for one day,
Wouldn't that be fun?

We would take care of the elders,
And those who are needing,
We would speak thoughtfully,
We would use common sense.

We would thank those who shoulder the burdens,
The doctors and nurses, the government workers,
The police force and cleaners,
And massage therapists.

We would be able to open the news again
Without this endless self-bracing,
We would have trust again
In food stamps, and social security, and federal banks.

Wouldn't that be fun?

Everything tipsy,
Everything topsy-turvy...
Life goes on, but for a long time already,
It hasn't gone up.

And now I need
A blessing to close this reading,
And all I want to say to you, God
Is this:

Please take the mask off, already,
Enough with the clowning,
Show mercy again,
And make it stop.

*R. Sonja K. Pilz, PhD
Art by Steve Silbert*





Different

“There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king’s laws; it is not in the king’s best interest to tolerate them.” (Esther 3:8)

There are so many people
dispersed among the people
of our land

who don't keep ourselves
separate from each other
because we're not

we're soccer moms and veterans
standing for immigrants
in Minnesota, Ohio, Maine

we're students walking out
of classes to protest brutality,
demanding compassion

we're clergy of every tradition
singing songs of hope
on icy sidewalks

we're elders and children
of every background, uniting
like stars and stripes to say

the only thing stronger
than hate is love
and we have so much love

Haman thinks our difference
makes us weak, but
he couldn't be more wrong

we are better together
than any of us could be alone
we will not be moved

R. Rachel Barenblat



May this be us

There are certain people,
He murmurs and mumbles,
Who do not bow down
To power and stocks.

They are disloyal,
They live true to their values,
You can't bribe them,
Sometimes they even dress up.

They will continue to vote,
And keep marching,
They will create networks,
And reach out with support.

May we be,
Among those righteous people,
Even if he throws lots,
May we not give up.

Baruch atah Adonai,
Matir asurimot....
Blessed are You, Adonai,
Who frees the captives.

R. Sonja K Pilz, PhD



A Purim Prayer

Blessed Holy Wholeness,
Sometimes we win.

Sometimes when we're not winning
We survive by telling stories about winning.

We like stories with happy endings but
Purim is not a story with a happy ending

Because though our people don't die
Lots of other innocent people do

And we killed them
In revenge

For someone else's actions.
Shameful.

Sometimes we lose when we win.
Help us do better.

Amen.

Trisha Arlin

No More Hiding

Everywhere I look
people have crosses
around their necks.
Some are gold, some silver
some quite ornate, others
simple yet all visible
open declarations of faith.

Occasionally, a Jewish star
glints here and there
not nearly as often though.
Well, by the numbers, there
aren't as many of us.
And, more likely, we
stay hidden,
living our inner Esther.

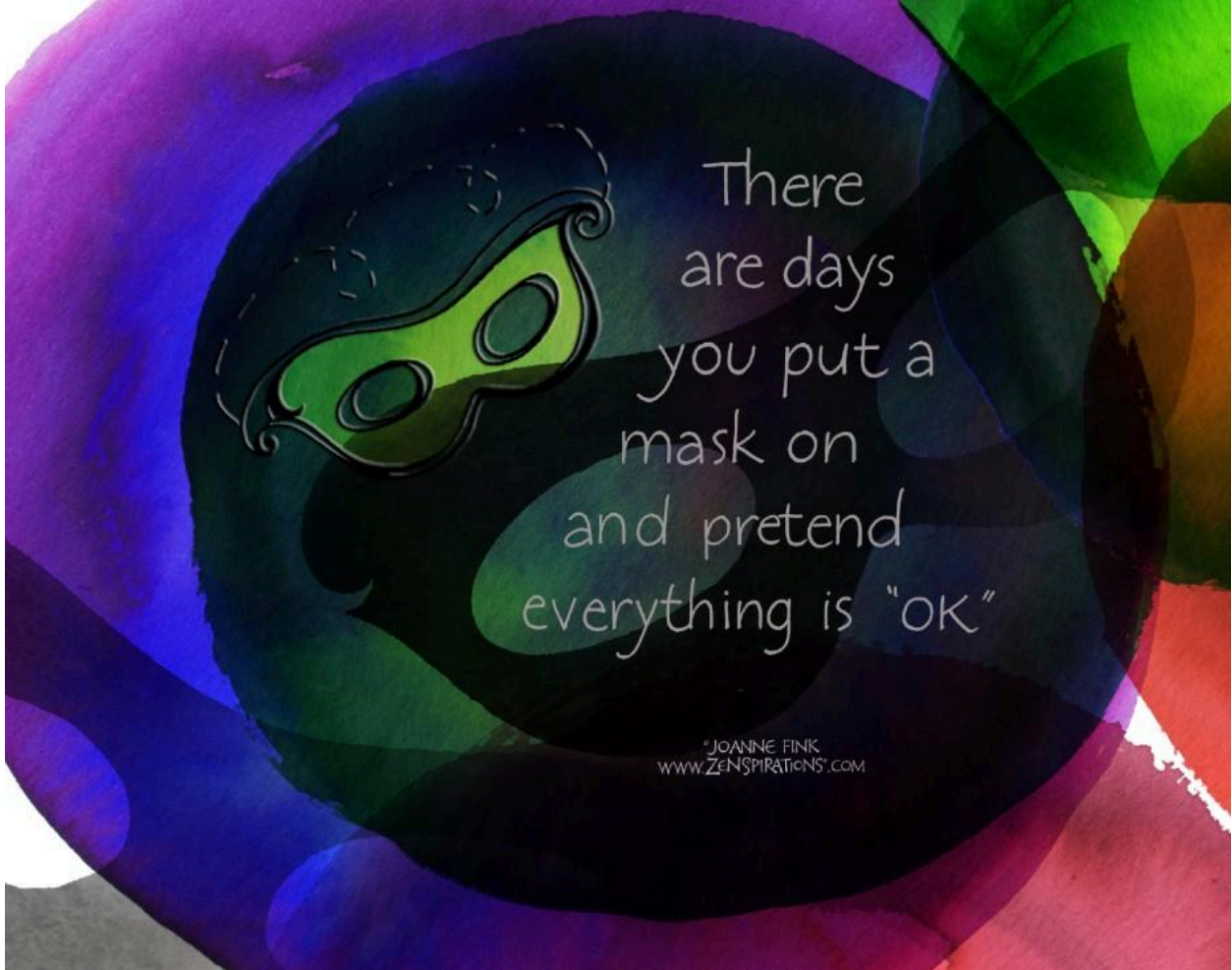
Most days I find my
Magen David calls to me as
necessary as the clothes
required for public appearance.
“*Shout US loudly,*” it seems to say.
Though we are too few,
Yes! We proclaim...
Yes, We Are Here, Too.

I muster courage to
overcome my fears.
The Shema fills my mouth,
rides my breath and lights my way.



sherrill cropper
art by Steve Silbert

There Are Days



Joanne Fink

The Tikkun of Haman's Ten Sons

In the Jewish mystical tradition all things that come in tens are connected - the ten utterances of creation, ten plagues, ten commandments, and Haman's ten sons. All are branches of the Tree of Life with its ten sefirot, or energy centers located on the Tree, in nature, and on our bodies. And all of these sets of tens arise from human biology itself with our ten fingers and ten toes.

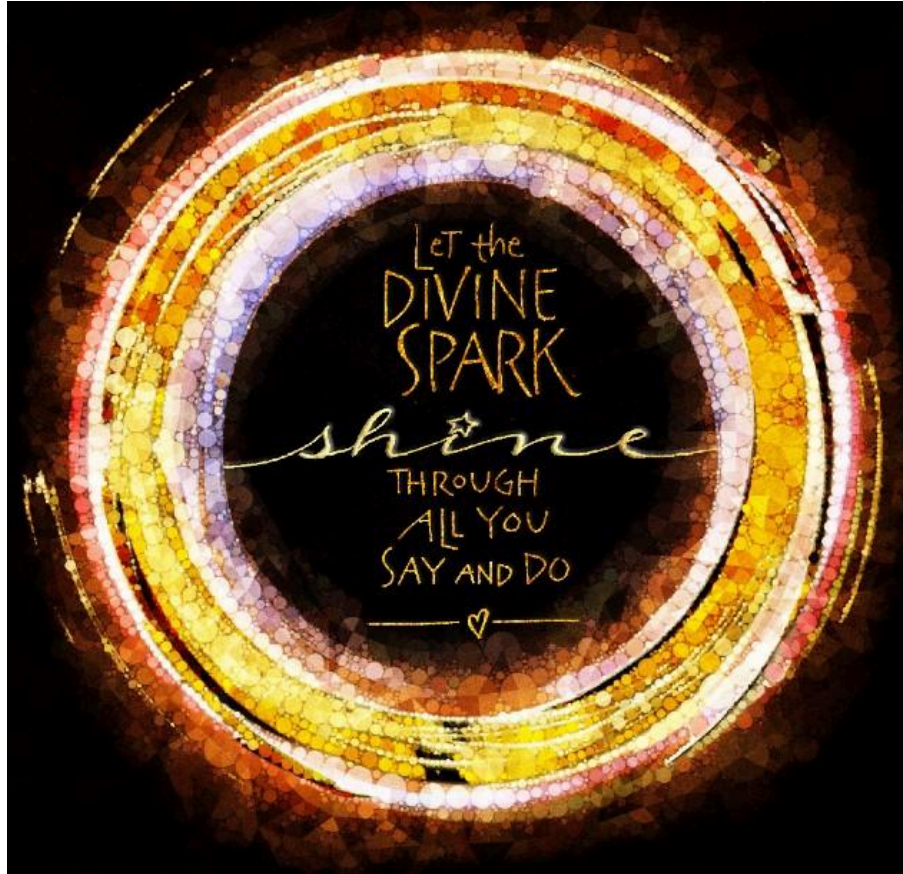
The mystics invite us to see the hanging of each of Haman's sons as a tikkun, a repair for the evil brought into the world by their father and mother. We might try to envision the death of each son as a tikkun for a particular moral attribute that Haman and his wife Zeresh tried to destroy. For example, the death of Parshandata meaning "given by prayer" can be imagined as a repair of faith.

The names of the sons are from Old Persian, and are difficult to translate into modern Persian and Hebrew, so our sages have not linked an exact attribute that each son's death repairs. The midrash says that the sons were all adults who participated in their parents' plot to kill all the Jews. So, why would their deaths merit to bring tikkunim (plural of tikkun)? Having been raised by such cruel parents, they too were victims of their parents' hatred of the Jews, and this might have earned them a degree of merit on a spiritual level. I imagine that a metaphysical tikkun occurs when their names are called out in a single breath as the megillah (scroll) of Esther is read on Purim.

Name In Hebrew	Transliteration	Possible Hebrew Meaning	Possible Tikkun/Repair
פְּרִשְׁנַדְתָּא	<i>Parshandata</i>	Given by prayer	repairs faith
דַּלְפוֹן	<i>Dalphon</i>	Poor	repairs empathy
אַסְפָּתָא	<i>Aspata</i>	Give	repairs generosity
פּוֹרְתָא	<i>Porata</i>	Fruitfulness	repairs family
אַדְלִיָּא	<i>Adalia</i>	Drawn to Yah	repairs faith
אַרִּידְתָּא	<i>Aridata</i>	Lion of Decree	repairs knowledge
פְּרַמְשְׁתָּא	<i>Parmashta</i>	Superior	repairs humility
אַרִּיסַי	<i>Arisai</i>	Lion of Ti	repairs creativity
אַרִּדַי	<i>Aridai</i>	The Lion is Sufficient	repairs sufficiency
וַיְזָתָא	<i>Vaizata</i>	Strong As The Wind	repairs power

R. David Zaslow

Spark



Joanne Fink

Where are You?

Poor Esther, pretending to be someone else, well, not her full self, anyway. Not outwardly a Jew.

And our ever-present midrash about Hashem not being directly mentioned in her story.

The essence of the divine is everywhere, and therefore, especially within us.

Aren't we created in Hashem's spiritual image? Why does there need to be a word, a name inscribed for everyone to see, feel or know that ever-presence?

God is not missing. Shekhinah is here. The spark never leaves.

sherrill cropper

About Us



Co-created by members of Bayit's Liturgical Arts Working Group, 2026.

At Bayit, we empower Jewish community by developing innovative tools and resources that foster spiritual connection, education, and growth. Together our visionary teams of clergy, liturgists, artists, game designers, and educators create, test, refine, and share tools for a Jewish future always under construction.

Find our collaborations here: [Liturgical Arts Working Group](#)

And our bios here: [Builder Biographies](#)